

Reading Agency Book Selection Protocol

Background and context

To support the delivery of its vision and mission, The Reading Agency is frequently involved in the expert curation of booklists designed to support and stretch reader choice and recommend quality assured content delivering the proven power of reading.

This paper outlines a best practice methodology to guide Reading Agency book selection processes. It is designed to ensure a robust approach delivered within a transparent and accountable framework that ensures fairness, consistency and equity.

Guiding principles

To ensure everyone is reading their way to a better life, The Reading Agency will always endeavour to deliver robust and equitable book selection processes that create diverse, balanced and inclusive booklists. The booklists should be accessible, meet the needs and stretch the reading choices of target audiences. This diversity and balance relates to content, characters, illustrations and authors with reference to, for example, race, sex and gender, sexuality, heritage, geography and disability and all other protected characteristics outlined in the 2010 Equalities Act¹

The following guidelines are designed to ensure that a robust and fair book selection protocol is in place to guide programme booklist development.

Exceptions to this process may relate to publisher-generated lists where selection is part of a subscription or paid campaign model. The public will be clearly informed of this fact. Publisher influenced lists may result will require amendments to the book selection process although The Reading Agency will continue to ensure that publisher influenced selection and content aligns with our core principles and values. A separate set of guidelines will be developed to support this area of work.

Guidelines

Except in circumstances previously outlined, The Reading Agency book selection processes should always include:

A book selection protocol

A book selection protocol should be produced at the start of any project to include aims, criteria and process. Existing templates should be used to create this protocol which should then be made available to all involved and externally on request. It should provide an audit trail for decision making and also reference any relevant evidence base if appropriate.

¹ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents>

Specified criteria for selecting titles should be made clear as part of this protocol based on the aims of the list and its target audience. This criteria will provide the framework for any call out for titles as well as for any evaluation undertaken.

Call for titles

There should be a stated and accountable process for calling for titles in line with the aims of the booklist. This will make clear the methodologies used for long list creation which might include an open publisher call out targeted to the specific aims of the booklist, public crowd sourcing, expert recommendation including from professionals as well those with authentic lived experience, stakeholder consultation and staff expertise. Staff expertise should not be the sole methodology used although an exception to this is covered in separate guidelines relating to our Reading Partners' work.

Panel assessment/review

A clear assessment process will be set out in the protocol relating to both longlisting and shortlisting processes and criteria for selection.

A panel should be convened to support the selection process. This panel should, whenever possible, include external representation relevant to the aims of the booklist including professional experts, readers and people with appropriate lived experience. In some instances, for safeguarding purposes and to ensure openness and protect vulnerabilities, it may be necessary to create a separately convened process to incorporate the user voice supported by expert intermediaries.

Representation on the panel should be diverse and inclusive encompassing different identities, heritages, backgrounds and lived experiences. Diversity targets will be set according to the focus of the booklist and as part of the development of our Diversity and Inclusion Policy. Panel makeup should be agreed with the line manager overseeing the project.

It is best practice for panel members to be named.

Panel members should be clearly informed of the requirements of the process including the number of meetings, timeframes and the agreed booklist selection criteria. Where possible, the contribution of panel members should be recognised and acknowledged. Compensation should be considered as part of any budgeting process as it may be appropriate where involvement is not part of a professional role and is necessary to enable engagement of priority stakeholders.

To support the selection process a form of measurement against criteria and scoring record should be created. This could be either through numerical grading (1-5) or more simply yes/no/maybe. This approach is currently in use across a number of Reading Agency programmes and provides an effective means of quantifying and comparing and contrasting responses to titles.

Panel members may be allocated a selection of titles to review or asked to familiarise themselves with all titles on a longlist depending on the length of the list and the process agreed. They should have access to physical books, manuscripts, PDFs or digital copy for review with format provision adjusted to meet accessibility needs. They should also be asked to complete scoring/review sheets aligned with the criteria for selection for each title in order to ensure

accountable decision making. These score cards should be retained by The Reading Agency for six months following publication of the list to inform any response to challenge or dispute.

Panel members should be brought together at least once either virtually or face to face to ensure all titles are considered fairly and by more than one person. There will be a process of final review following panel discussion as lists are adjusted to ensure balance and diversity of content and author, title availability and a spread of publishers. Panel members should always be given an opportunity to review and agree the final version of a booklist.

All those involved in book selection are required to raise any conflicts of interest concerning individual titles relating to personal interest or gain, personal or professional connection or any other such factors that might influence choice. The panel chair will then decide whether the individual should be asked to withdraw from the consideration of the specific title where the conflict of interest arises.

Formats

The titles selected should be available in a range of formats to ensure accessibility including hard copy, e-book and audio. The needs of readers with specific needs e.g. dyslexia should also be acknowledged.² In some instances, digital content including apps might also be appropriate. Book selection criteria might also make explicit the requirement for e-book availability accessible to library e-lending in line with the delivery of specific programmes.

Available formats should be made clear as part of the selection process as should publisher and, if appropriate, date of publication.

Booklists not in the English language

When releasing a booklist featuring titles not in the English language e.g. Welsh-language titles, The Reading Agency should work with a trusted partner to select titles e.g. Books Council of Wales / Literature Wales to ensure quality of content and that The Reading Agency's protocols are centred in the selection process.

Dealing with contentious material/author views

Whilst this is a difficult and emotive area, The Reading Agency's agreed policy is to judge books on their content and not on the political affiliations and/or public opinions of their author unless those books break the law and/or relate to direct and known harm, e.g. publish misinformation or promote injury and hate.

On considering the ethical framework for book selection and promotion, the board has agreed to adopt as an overarching framework the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professional's (CILIP) policy on "Intellectual Freedom, Access to Information and Censorship" which guides public library stock selection. This states relating to content that:

Access should not be restricted on any grounds except that of the law. If publicly available material has not incurred legal penalties, then it should not be excluded on moral, political, religious, racial or gender grounds to satisfy the demands of sectional interest.³

² See separate SEND framework

³ [Intellectual Freedom Statements, CILIP, Intellectual freedom, access to information and censorship \(ifla.org\)](https://www.ifla.org/publications/intellectual-freedom-statements)

Within this framework, book selection processes should observe CILIP's recently published Ethics Framework which identifies the need to respect and defend:⁴

- Human rights, equalities, diversity and equitable treatment (*including that of authors*)
- Intellectual freedom, including freedom from censorship
- Impartiality and the avoidance of inappropriate bias

Taken these considerations into account, book selection should also aim to present a plurality of viewpoints and content.

This policy should be made known to panel members and included in any book selection protocol along with the opportunity to opt out if they are uncomfortable with the approach. This option relates to the entire book selection process rather than the consideration of individual titles.

If exceptions to this policy are advised, these should be raised first with SMT and then if appropriate with board representation.

Complaints/Dispute Resolution

If any complaint is raised or a dispute arises as to the operation of a book selection panel, the terms of any book selection protocol or the outcome of selection, such matters will be dealt with in accordance with the book selection dispute policy outlined below. This policy should be made clear in the book selection protocol.

Book Selection Dispute Policy

All internal and external issues/complaints will be considered firstly by the book selection panel/team. The panel's decision will then be considered by the Creative Director who will make a recommendation to The Reading Agency Chief Executive Officer for ratification by the Chair of the Board. If required, in exceptional circumstances and on recommendation by the Chair, the decision may be discussed further by the Board or an appropriate Board sub-group. The decision of the Chair on the matter will be final.

⁴ [Freedom of access to information - CILIP: the library and information association](#)